

Syllabus

PHIL 317, History of American philosophy, Fall 2026

Course information

Course	PHIL 317: History of American philosophy
Term	Fall 2026
Meeting times	9/24, 10/22, and 11/19, 4:00–5:15
Location	Jerome Richfield 315
Instructor	E. R. Jiménez (email)
Office hours	Tuesdays, 2:30–3:30, Sierra Tower 506; Wednesdays, 12:00–1:00, on Zoom ; and by appointment

Description and objectives

Course description

American philosophy is, for us, a compelling inroad to appreciation of the place and nature of philosophy today, not only owing to its geographical proximity but owing to its distinctive interests in making sense of the nature of experience and the relation between experience and community. We're going to spend the semester focused on American aesthetics and philosophy of experience, from the Great Awakening through the Great Migration and the making of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands.

Course objectives

Our course has substantive and formal objectives.

- Substantively, our objective is to come to some appreciation of a variety of theories of experience, and their bearing on questions about universality and community.
- Formally, our objective is to improve our capacities for reading comprehension, analysis of arguments, and written and oral communication, through the digestion and discussion of texts drawn from the history of philosophy in the United States.

Requirements

Student learning outcomes

Because this course satisfies the American institutions, institutions, and ideal requirement, students will:

- Describe and analyze significant events covering a minimum time span of approximately one hundred years and occurring in the entire area now included in the United States of America, including the relationships of regions within that area and with external regions and powers as appropriate to the understanding of those events within the United States during the period under study.
- Describe and analyze the role of major ethnic and social groups in such events and the contexts in which the events have occurred.
- Describe and analyze events presented within a framework that illustrates the continuity of the American experience and its derivation from other cultures, including consideration of three or more of the following: politics, economics, social movements and geography.

Additionally, because this is a writing intensive course, students will:

- Develop and clearly define their ideas through writing.
- Ethically integrate sources of various kinds into their writing.
- Compose texts through drafting, revising and completing a finished product.
- Express themselves through their writing by posing questions, making original claims and coherently structuring complex ideas.
- Revise their writing for greater cogency and clarity.
- Utilize adopted communication modes and documentation styles of specific disciplines (MLA, APA, Chicago, CBE, etc.) where appropriate.

Assignments and grading

Assignments

You have effectively one assignment in this course, but it has a few parts. Simply put, over the course of the semester you're going to compile a portfolio of argument summaries and interpretations. You're going to complete one for each of the four units on the [course outline](#). Then at the end of the semester you're going to do two things. You're going to compose a submit a longer, expanded version of one of your portfolio entries, and you're going to complete an oral assessment in which I choose one of your portfolio entries at random and ask you about it.

Unit commentaries

For each of the course's four units, you're going to complete a 600–800-word commentary. Each commentary should relate at least two thinkers or texts and advance a claim about their historical or philosophical relationship. A complete commentary:

- identifies a significant point of continuity, conflict, appropriation, or change;
- supports that claim with specific textual evidence; and
- articulates important differences between the two texts or authors.

I grade unit commentaries for completion only. For details on deadlines and substance, see the [course outline](#).

Essay and memo

You're going to take one of your unit commentaries and develop it into a 1,500–1,800-word historical-philosophical essay. The essay should trace a problem, concept, conflict, or transformation across at least three texts from the course, and defend a claim about the relationship among them.

That essay should be accompanied by a short revision mem explaining how you expanded your unit commentary, how your understanding changed as a result, and what, in your view, remains difficult or unresolved.

The expanded essay and memo are due with your final portfolio on **December 15**.

Oral exams

At the end of the semester, you'll complete a seven-minute oral exam based on your essay. You'll begin with a one-minute statement of your historical claim. I'll then ask one question about your textual evidence, one question challenging the relationship you've claimed between the two thinkers, and one or two questions about relations between your essay and other material covered in the course.

The oral exam is intended to assess your understanding, not your quality as a performer. Confidence, speed, eye contact, polish and other intangibles are not grading criteria.

Oral exams will take place during finals week, **December 14–18**. It is likely we'll need to make use of time outside of our finals exam time for this purpose. We'll discuss scheduling of the oral exam as the end of the semester nears.

On-campus sessions

For each of our three on-campus sessions, we're going to work at developing our capacities for interpretation. Each session will have a different objective, and each session will conclude with you handing something in.

- **For the September 24 session**, you're going to read Emerson's "Self-Reliance" and "The American Scholar," and before class you're going to reflect on this question: How can a 'self-reliant thinker' speak for anyone else? We're going to work through a tension in Emerson together, and you're going to hand in a commentary draft at the end of class.
- **For the October 22 session**, you're going to bring a complete draft of your unit 2 commentary (on any of Cavell, Fuller, or Douglass). Expect to give a one-minute statement of the main claim of your commentary and its textual evidence. Over the course of the session, we're going to discuss how to 'use' textual evidence, as well as discuss the substance of these three authors' views. You will then be permitted to submit a revised version of your unit 2 commentary after our in-class discussion.
- **For the November 19 session**, in advance of class you're going to answer this question for at least two of the unit 3 readings (Peirce, James, Dewey, Addams, Santayana): Is experience isolating, or does it provide the basis of a shared world or community, and how? Prepare a one-minute description of how these authors respond to this question, and a claim about their relation (difference or similarity).

Grading

Your grade will break down like this:

- **Unit commentaries:** 30%
 - Commentaries, four of them, are each thus the equivalent of 7.5% of your final grade, with no partial credit.
- **Revised essay and revision memo:** 35%
 - Your essay and memo will be graded out of a possible total of 20 points; each point is 2% of your final grade.
- **Oral defense:** 20%
 - Your defense will be graded out of a possible 10 points; each point is 3% of your final grade.
- **On-campus sessions:** 15%
 - Each session has a complete/incomplete grade worth 5% of your final grade.

Rubrics

Evaluation for each of the assignments will follow these rubrics:

Unit commentaries

Commentaries are graded for completion; you get either a 1 (worth 7.5% toward your final grade) for a completed commentary or a 0 (worth 0%, of course). A complete commentary engages directly with two or more relevant texts from a unit. Commentaries must be at least 600 words to be accepted for completion.

Essay and memo

Your expanded essay should be the single most sophisticated piece of philosophical work you do in this course this semester, and you should deliberately view it that way. You're going to take one of your commentaries, supplement it with a third thinker or text drawn from any of the four units, and then compose an essay in which you:

- describe the problem each of your thinkers is addressing, and why resolving it is difficult;
- describe and explain the views of your authors on it;
- describe and explain a philosophically or historically significant difference, or conflict to be found among those authors; and
- describe what about the problem or issue or question remains unresolved.

The existence and quality of each of these parts is worth roughly a fifth of your essay grade, with the revision memo worth the final fifth.

In the revision memo, you will describe:

- how the expansion of your commentary into an essay changed the thought in your essay; and
- what relevant issues or questions, to your mind, remain unresolved.

Essays will be graded out of 20 points (each point worth 1.75% of your final grade), with each of the four components and the memo worth 4 points each. For each component:

Points	Description
0	You didn't do it
1	You did it at all
2	You did it fairly well
3	You did it very well
4	You did it exceptionally well

Revised essays must be at least 1,500 words to be accepted; revision memos must be at least 350 words.

Oral exam

Your oral exam is both an examination of your understanding of the material covered and discussed in your final essay and an examination of your understanding of the material of the course.

Your oral exam will be graded for evidence of preparation. You should be ready with responses to each of these questions for each of the three units not covered by your expanded essay.

Your oral exam will be graded out of 10 points (each point being worth 2% of your final grade), along the following lines:

Points	Description
0	You weren't prepared
1–2	You were barely prepared
3–4	You were slightly prepared
5–6	You were prepared
7–8	You were well prepared
9–10	You were exceptionally well prepared

On-campus sessions

Attendance and participation in on-campus sessions is graded for completion. Attending means being in class from beginning to end. Participation means completion of the in-class assignment. You get 5% for achieving both; 15% total for all three.

Grading scale

Your final percentage grade will be rounded up to the nearest integer and your letter grade will be based on the following scale:

Percentage	Letter grade
95–100	A
90–95	A-
87–90	B+
83–87	B
80–83	B-

Percentage	Letter grade
77–80	C+
73–77	C
70–73	C-
67–70	D+
63–67	D
60–63	D-
< 60	F

Policies

Attendance

Attendance doesn't immediately impact your grade, but you should not expect to do well in this course if you aren't here. I will monitor attendance loosely, however, for a reason I describe below. (See the section on attendance and participation below.)

If you miss class for any reason, you don't need to tell me about it. [Check the calendar](#) to keep abreast of what's going on. Generally, I'll put anything of significance on the calendar, but I'd recommend you make a friend in class in case you want a more thorough rundown of what you missed.

How I interpret policies

I interpret rules under a guiding thought about *fairness*: that policies should be applied in the same way for everyone; that everyone should have the same shot. I never think in terms of how the interpretation of a policy affects you or any other student individually; I always think in terms of how it affects the class as a whole.

When you ask for a rule to be relaxed, then, I'm not thinking about whether to relax the rule for you, but whether it would be fair to relax the rule for everyone (or everyone similarly situated). Most of the time this comes down to the simple question whether the policy should even exist, and if your classmates have already been acting in accordance with the policy, then to suspend it after the fact would be unfair to them for the diligence they've demonstrated.

University and other policies

Important note about a possible work stoppage during the semester

The California Faculty Association (the union that represents all CSU faculty, including lecturer faculty, tenure-line faculty, coaches, counselors, and librarians) is in the midst of a difficult contract dispute with the CSU system-wide administration. In response to the CSU management's stance, it is possible that the faculty union will call a strike or other work stoppage this term. I promise to inform the class as soon as possible of any disruption to our class meeting schedule. For further information about the issues involved in the strike, please see the resources at www.calfac.org and www.cfabargaining.org.

Missed classes for university-approved activities

If, while representing the university in an official curriculum-related, university-approved activity, you are required to miss classes, reach out to me to discuss next steps. Absence from class for official curriculum-related, university-approved activities does not relieve you from responsibility for any part of the course work required during your period of absence.

Academic integrity

Cheating is intentionally using or attempting to use unauthorized materials, information or study aids in any academic exercise. When completing any work for this course—written or otherwise—assume that external assistance (e.g., books, notes, calculators, cell phones/cameras, other electronic devices, use of artificial intelligence, conversation with others) is prohibited unless I specifically say otherwise. You may not allow others to conduct research or prepare any work for you without advance authorization from the instructor. This includes but is

not limited to the services of commercial term-paper companies or web sites. Substantial portions of the same academic work may not be submitted for credit in more than one course without authorization.

Fabrication is intentional falsification or invention of any information or citation in an academic exercise.

Plagiarism is representing the words, ideas, or work of another as your own, in any academic exercise. You must identify every direct quotation by quotation marks, appropriate indentation, or other means of identification. Prompt acknowledgment is required when material from another source is paraphrased or summarized in whole or in part in your own words. Information obtained in one's reading or research that is not common knowledge among students in the course must be acknowledged (this includes the use of artificial intelligence).

Facilitating academic dishonesty is intentionally or knowingly helping or attempting to help another to commit an act of academic dishonesty.

Cheating or plagiarism in connection with an academic program at a CSU campus is listed in Section 41301, Title 5, California Code of Regulations as an offense for which a student may be expelled, suspended or given a less severe disciplinary sanction. The full policy, including penalties, is in CSUN's [Academic Integrity Policy](#).

You are asked not to use generative AI at any stage of your work in this course—not for brainstorming, outlining, drafting, revising, or editing. Everything you submit, and everything done to prepare what you submit, should be produced by you.

The reason is not suspicion. The assignments here are built so that the work of producing them is the learning: attempting something, finding that the first attempt doesn't hold up, and revising it is how the underlying skill gets built. Work that arrives without that process may look finished, but it leaves the skill unbuilt.

By "generative AI" I mean tools such as ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini, and also AI features built into other software—Grammarly, for example—that generate, rewrite, summarize, or translate text. If you aren't sure whether something counts, ask before you use it.

If you use assistive technology as part of an approved accommodation, this policy is not aimed at you. Come talk to me and we'll make the expectations clear.

Student support and resources

Disability accommodations (DRES)

If you have a disability and need accommodations, please register with [Disability Resources and Educational Services \(DRES\)](#) or the [National Center on Deafness \(NCOD\)](#). DRES is in Bayramian Hall, room 110, and can be reached at (818) 677-2684 or dres@csun.edu. NCOD is on Bertrand Street in Jeanne Chisholm Hall and can be reached at (818) 677-2054, videophone (818) 435-3887, or ncod@csun.edu. If you would like to discuss your need for accommodations with me, please contact me to set up an appointment.

Basic needs (CSUN with A HEART)

If you are facing challenges related to food insecurity, housing precarity/homelessness, mental health, access to technology, eldercare/childcare, or healthcare, you can find guidance, help, and resources from [CSUN with A HEART](#).

Mental health resources

[University Counseling Services \(UCS\)](#) is a mental health center for students enrolled at CSUN. UCS provides a range of high-quality mental health services including initial evaluations, short-term counseling and psychotherapy, Wellness Workshops, group treatment, psychiatric services, crisis/urgent care services, and case management. UCS is located in Bayramian Hall 520 and can be reached at (818) 677-2366, Option 1 (Option 3 after hours), or coun@csun.edu.

Call or text 988 to reach the [988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline](#) 24 hours a day. The older number, (800) 273-8255, still routes to the same service.

Reach the [Crisis Text Line](#) by texting START to 741741 (free, 24/7, confidential).

Learning Resource Center

Free tutoring is available on campus through the Learning Resource Center (LRC): tutoring in multiple subjects, one-on-one help with writing and grammar, and reading and writing workshops. Hours and appointments are on the [Learning Resource Center site](#).

Disclosures under the CSU Nondiscrimination Policy (Title IX)

All faculty and staff (with few exceptions) are classified as a “responsible employee.” In the event that you choose to write, speak, or otherwise disclose about having experienced discrimination or harassment based on a protected status (including Title IX violations such as dating/domestic violence, sexual exploitation, sexual harassment, sexual misconduct, or stalking), and/or retaliation, and specify that this violence occurred while you or the perpetrator were a CSUN student, federal and state laws, and CSU policy, require that I notify our campus Title IX Coordinator/DHR Administrator within the Office of Equity and Compliance (equityandcompliance@csun.edu).

Someone from the Office of Equity and Compliance will contact you to inform you of your rights and options and connect you with support resources, including possibilities for holding accountable the person who harmed you. Know that you will not be forced to share information and your level of involvement will be your choice.

If you do not want the Office of Equity and Compliance notified, instead of disclosing the experience to me, you can speak **confidentially*** with:

- **Campus Care Advocate:**
 - Klotz Student Health Center, Room 210
 - Phone: (818) 677-7492
 - Email: careadvocates@csun.edu
- **University Counseling Services**
 - Bayramian Hall, 520 Phone:
 - Phone: (818) 677-2366, Option 1
 - Email: coun@csun.edu

**Note: If it is determined that an alleged perpetrator poses an imminent threat to the broader campus community or if person(s) under 18 years of age are involved, our Campus Care Advocate is required to notify our Department of Police Services.*

For more information regarding your university rights and options, see the [Office of Equity and Compliance](#) or read the [CSU Nondiscrimination Policy](#) in full.

Pregnancy-related modifications

As a part of your rights under the CSU Nondiscrimination Policy and as CSUN’s commitment to compliance with Title IX and supporting the academic success of pregnant students and students with pregnancy related conditions (pregnancy, childbirth, termination of pregnancy, lactation, and all related medical conditions or recovery), you can request reasonable, related modifications from the University. Please email CSUN’s Title IX Coordinator/DHR Administrator, La Shonda Coleman, in the Office of Equity and Compliance at equityandcompliance@csun.edu. The Office of Equity and Compliance will work with your professors and academic unit to provide reasonable modifications needed to be supportive of your education while pregnant or due to related medical conditions or recovery under Title IX. The [CSU Nondiscrimination Policy](#) has more information.

Contacting me

You have a variety of ways of reaching me and getting your questions or concerns resolved. These are also all ways of staying engaged in the course.

1. **Ask your question in class.** Other students might have the same question; other students might have answers. In addition to improving class morale, you’re helping each other out when you get a question answered in class.
2. **Join the course Discord.**
 - Find regular updates in [#announcements](#)

- Find discussion of the material and the course in [#general](#)
 - Pose a question in [#questions](#)
 - Discuss off-topic issues in [#chat](#)
 - **Send me a direct message.** I'm going to try to be pretty attentive to DMs and activity on Discord throughout the work week, so should be fairly reachable:
 - M/W/F 9–5, and especially 10–12 and 1–3
 - T/Th 9–5 sporadically (I'm teaching)
3. **Come to my office hours.** I hold them Tuesdays, 2:30–3:30, in Sierra Tower 506; Wednesdays, 12:00–1:00, [on Zoom](#); and at other times by appointment.
 - If you have something sensitive you need to discuss with me personally, this is the way to do it.
 - [Write me an email](#) or [send me a DM on Discord](#) if you need to schedule a different time; I'll see if it's possible.
 4. **Shoot me an email** for any more official business. I'm at [erick dot jimenez at csun dot edu](mailto:erick.dot.jimenez@csun.edu).
 5. **Visit a tutor.** For more information, [go to the tutoring web site](#).
 6. **Poke around this course site.**
 - For questions about assignments, grading, and other policy matters, [see the page on policies](#).
 - For questions about readings, [see the course outline](#).
 - For questions about what's going on, [see the calendar](#).

Version

Version 0.9 · Pre-semester